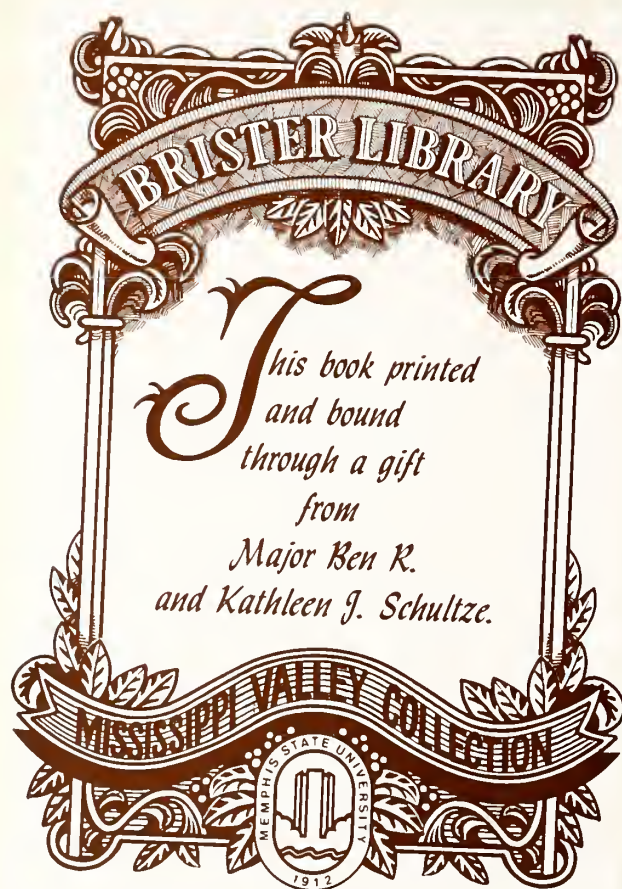


AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE WINFIELD DUNN ADMINISTRATION  
INTERVIEWS WITH  
EUGENE W. FOWINKLE

BY - CHARLES W. CRAWFORD  
TRANSCRIBER - BETTY WILLIAMS  
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE  
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INTERVIEWS WITH EUGENE W. FOWINKLE

AUGUST 1, 1985

BY CHARLES W. CRAWFORD

TRANSCRIBER - BETTY WILLIAMS

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE

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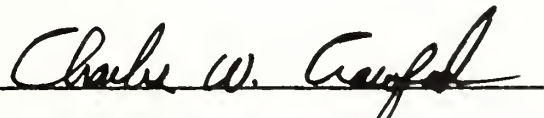
## ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE

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PLACE Nashville, TN

DATE August 1, 1985

  
Dr. Eugene Fowinkle  
(INTERVIEWEE)

  
(For the Mississippi Valley Archives  
of the John Willard Brister Library  
of Memphis State University)



THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THE PROJECT IS "THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE WINFIELD DUNN ADMINISTRATION." THE PLACE IS NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE AND THE DATE IS AUGUST 1, 1985. THE INTERVIEW IS WITH DR. EUGENE W. FOWINKLE. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE. TRANSCRIBED BY BETTY WILLIAMS. INTERVIEW #1.

DR. CRAWFORD: Dr. Fowinkle, I would like to get a little biographical information about you. Perhaps if you want to, you can start with your family and when and where you were born. I'd like to cover your background, your education, and professional life and anything till the time that you became associated with Winfield Dunn and the administration.

DR. FOWINKLE: Well, you've clearly done some homework. Yes, I was born in Memphis, September 2, 1934. I am the youngest of nine children--five sisters and three brothers. My father was a postman in Memphis. He raised that big family through the Depression reasonably well on a postman's salary. So we are very pleased and proud of our family background and heritage.



I attended public schools in Memphis beginning with A.B. Hill and then moving to Whitehaven from South Memphis in 1945 and finished high school there. In 1952 I went to Southwestern at Memphis.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now Rhodes College.

DR. FOWINKLE: Now Rhodes College in Memphis at my pre-medical education in three years. Then on to the University of Tennessee Medical School where I graduated in December of 1958. From there I went to an internship with the City of Memphis Hospitals and following that began a neuro-surgery residency at the Baptist Hospital in Memphis. Shortly after I began that neuro-surgical residency I learned that I didn't like neuro-surgery and mainly because of the confinement of that specialty. I found out I was spending my life in a room 20 feet square and I felt a need to travel a bigger route so I looked around at other specialties and decided to go into medical administration through the public health tract.

I joined the Memphis and Shelby County Health Department in 1960. I then went to the University of Michigan that fall where I during the next year obtained my Masters of Public Health in Medical Administration. I returned to the Memphis/Shelby County Health Department where I then had a rather rapid advancement because of some tragic deaths of my predecessors. Dr. L.M. Graves, who had been local health officer there for many years, died with a heart attack about two years after I joined the department. I had the privilege of understudying Dr. Graves, a magnificent person and a very fine public health physician and Dr. Noble Guthrie, his successor. Dr. Guthrie unfortunately had a brain tumor a couple of years later and



died very quickly. At the young age of, I don't know, just beyond ages 30 I found myself director of a very large local health department much to my surprise.

I struggled for a couple of years until I gained enough maturity and insight to run a very fine department which had become a very fine department through the years under Dr. Graves and Dr. Guthrie.

If I just might go on and make a bridge here, is there anything else in terms of background? You know I can give you a lot of material that is on my cv (cumulative vita), but I can hand you that as well.

DR. CRAWFORD: Just connect with it from here, if you

DR. FOWINKLE: Let me just move on to my first encounter with Dr. Winfield Dunn. And I can back-track in history just a little bit to say that Memphis was through the years justifiably fiercely protective of its water supply. It took great pride in its artesian wells and its deep well supply almost to the point of worshipping it. Years before Memphis had such a good water supply it had many many problems with infectious diseases of many types, some arising from water-born organisms. But it was fiercely protective of its water.

As it was found through the years that fluoridation of public water supplies significantly reduced dental cavities in the children who drank floridated water, Dr. Graves began many years ago to get Memphis water supply floridated for that purpose without success. Dr. Guthrie continued that during his





Short administration again without success, but laying very much important background public educational base upon which I and others then could work. I resumed that battle, being convinced of the need for fluoridated water because during my early days of public health I went out into the schools and examined children to find that their teeth were in horrible condition, particularly in the lower income areas of the city, but not limited to the low income areas.

So I likewise became convinced that this was a much needed public health measure. I got the idea from a fellow local health officer in New York City who got New York City's water supply fluoridated by suggesting that the city give to the children of New York a Christmas present that magnificent health benefit. It worked in New York City and I said, "why not in Memphis?" It so happened that this was shortly after the assassination of Martin Luther King and Memphis needed a very positive thing to hold before themselves and the rest of the world. And so I wrote to the City Council and all of the local radio and television and newspaper chief executive officers suggesting this idea.

It caught on and there were a lot of interviews and a lot of public media exposure and so forth which then precipitated a meeting with the City Council for them to consider fluoridation of Memphis water supply. As in the past a big anti-fluoridation guns came in from all over the country to oppose our attempt to fluoridate the water supply. So we gave a great deal of attention to that hearing before the City Council. I



Put together fifteen people to stand before the City Council to talk about the advantages and safety of fluoridating water supplies. I asked the local dental society for a representative. They recommended a person who was then chairman of the local dental society's fluoridation committee named Winfield Dunn.

DR. CRAWFORD:           You had not met him before?

DR. FOWINKLE:           I had never heard of Winfield Dunn prior to that point in time. We had a lot of very informed and powerful people making their presentations from around the country. Looking at it retrospectively, fortunately I scheduled Winfield Dunn as the last person. It was a long hearing. I met him before the hearing. He sat patiently through a four or five hour hearing of both the proponents and the opponents of fluoridation. Our time came and we went through ours--they were all good--but when Winfield Dunn stepped up to the microphone the first time I'd heard this man talk. He began the most magnificent persuasive--both personal, professional and societal--argument for fluoridation of our water supply.

I said, "Good gracious! This man is really going places! He'll make a great figure in the field of dentistry!"

(Laughter) Shortly thereafter and through a variety of other contacts we became personal friends. I got to know Winfield and Betty Dunn. My wife, Ruby also became friends.

Shortly after that episode, Governor Buford Ellington asked me to come to Nashville to take the state health Commis-



sioner's job, mainly because Medicaid was facing us and he wanted a young fearless person to undertake the implementation of that very large program. I accepted that job and left Memphis and lost contact with Winfield for a number of years.

Well it was a year and a half because I came somewhat in the middle of the Ellington administration.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that about July of 1969?

DR. FOWINKLE: Well, July of 1969 was when I did come to Nashville. That's correct. July 8th, 1969

I well remember. I left home telling my wife I was going to see Governor Ellington about this job that I really didn't intend to take it at all that there were a number of conditions that would have to be met in order for me to take it. I thought it was unlikely that they would be willing to meet all those conditions and requirements. I was wrong. When I walked into Governor Ellington's office, he shook my hand and chatted for a minute and he said, "Fowinkle, you are going to have some concerns about this job." He went over my list before I could ever get it out of my pocket and met them all before I could say anything.

After he finished I said, "I guess Governor, I'll have to take it. You've answered all my questions."

So I called my wife and sure enough we moved. I had a very busy year and a half. I was not aware quite frankly of what was going on politically. In fact, that Winfield Dunn became interested in the governorship and had already begun the preliminary motions to get there. Only when I learned, I guess



close to the time that he announced for governor, that he was coming. I was elated and hoping that he would come because I wanted to stay on and continue some of the things I had done and I had a great deal of respect for him and I hoped he would have some for me as well.

You know the story of his election and one of his early meetings after the election and before the inauguration, our paths crossed and he said, "Gene, I want to talk with you about your serving in my administration." I was elated and we moved forward to his inauguration and my appointment.

I had a wonderful experience. That's some of the background that got us together. If there are gaps in that, I'll be happy to try to fill them.

DR. CRAWFORD:           What about getting the new cabinet started?

                          You were one of the people who carried over so you didn't have to learn a new job. What meetings did you go through about getting the cabinet organized?

DR. FOWINKLE:           My job was so specific and I was apparently

                          selected by Dunn without a great deal of thought or discussion for options. I was an incumbent and worked right on through that period as you know with a full time job. I was not very much involved in the process which led to the appointment of the other cabinet members. I was interested of course. State government requires a lot of inter face and interactions among the various departments, particularly those that have a staff service character. I was extra-





ordinarily interested in those appointments, but not much involved in it.

DR. CRAWFORD:           Do you remember your first cabinet meeting after Winfield Dunn became governor?

DR. FOWINKLE:           I can't pick the first one out of my memory but I do generally remember the tenor of day and the style of Winfield's dealing with his cabinet and holding cabinet meetings.

There was a lot of congratulatory conversation and a lot of conversation along the lines of commitment to make this the best administration this state has ever seen, the opportunities of first Republican governorship in fifty years and many other things which led to justifiable, I guess I could say, almost a euphoria in those days. It really was a new day. We accepted that as a new day and the challenge of the new day.

I remember a few things that Winfield said early. One along the lines that "I am absolutely committed to bring dignity to this office." I well remember those words. "I want to bring dignity to the office, but I am going to continue to be Winfield Dunn. I am me and I am going to be me. I think the state said they wanted me and they saw me in the campaign. I am going to continue that reality, but I am going to try to do it in a dignified way and I want your help in so doing." I think there was a esprit de corps there. All of us understood that statement and all of us were committed to that course of action.



DR. CRAWFORD: Dr. Fowinkle, you saw some changes in cabinet meetings and I am interested in the way they were conducted. You know as far as the Blue Book goes the state organizational chart is the same in one administration and another. But I know the style changes and the practices change. How did the cabinet meetings differ under the new administration?

DR. FOWINKLE: Well, Governor Ellington did not have many formal meetings. He had some, but not many. His style was less intense, but good I thought. He got up early every morning and if there was something urgent on the minds of any cabinet member they were invited on any morning to come out to the residence before breakfast time and eat breakfast with him. If there was something of a personal or sensitive or urgent nature, he made that invitation open so that we could drive out there any morning we wanted to about 5:30 or 6:00 o'clock and be ready for breakfast.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was early!

DR. FOWINKLE: He got up early and started his day early. So he made himself available in that way and I used that opportunity several times with Buford Ellington. Then he would leave home and arrive at his office at about 7 o'clock every morning. If you had something that wasn't quite of the urgency or the privacy that required a private meeting of the governor at the residence, he spent the first hour of every morning from about 7 to 8 drinking coffee



in his conference room. That conference room was open to his cabinet and certain other officers of state government--the Attorney General or the Comptroller or the Secretary of State. A few of those who were actively involved in administration of state government even from the legislative or judicial side felt free to come into the conference room and talk of things of general nature and importance to government. I would usually participate in one of those early morning chats once or twice a week, because one could get a feel of mutual problems or of movements in state government or big changes on the scene things of this nature. There was a lot of background information as well as an opportunity to sit down and talk about some specifics in a casual situation.

Then the governor would begin his appointments and he usually met people on a very rapid basis. Then in the early afternoon on a typical day, he would try to get away and go play golf. You could also follow him on the golf course, if you wanted to talk with him. And the cabinet did that, sometimes even if they didn't play golf.

DR. CRAWFORD: Of course, he had started real early.

DR. FOWINKLE: That's right. He had started very early that day and he did his thing but he made himself available. I think this was a very effective way, but a very casual way of dealing with the business of state government.

Now the new administration--Winfield Dunn administration--was very, very different. It was new. There was an urgency to



get on with business of state government. There was the lack personal experience on the part of the cabinet and the governor with the affairs of state government. There was a learning curve.

DR. CRAWFORD:            Practically all of them were new with the exception of a few of you in the cabinet.

DR. FOWINKLE:            That was correct. So there was an intensity and an excitement which involved a lot of cabinet meetings I think as I recall in the early days with an effort to get up and get on with the state business and to get on some of the ideas and state visions and challenges that were out there.

DR. CRAWFORD:            How often were you meeting at those times?

DR. FOWINKLE:            It's hard for me to remember, but it seemed that they were rather frequent--every week or two--of meetings of the cabinet to get the business of state government going on right away.

Even before the inauguration the governor-elect had an office here and we began to make that transition before he was inaugurated and actually took office. So there was a lot of activity and intensity and a lot of interrelationship that I was unaccustomed to in the previous administration. Looking back at it, it was crucial that it did occur, it did get us up and going as an organization and a new leadership and quickly. I thought it was effectively achieved.





DR. CRAWFORD: Did it take long for the new commission members to get acquainted with each other and get to work together?

DR. FOWINKLE: No, it did not. I'll tell you, Winfield and Betty Dunn were extraordinarily effective in making us a team. They hosted an awful lot of social and semi-social events where it gave us the opportunity to get together and get to know each other and get to know each other's families and get to know each other's thought patterns and problems. So in a very short period of time we got to know each other well. He made the governor's residence extremely available--probably more than any of the four governors I worked with. I felt like I could almost drive up there any time and meet with them day or night personally or privately or socially. However, I think other cabinet members felt the same way. It was our place as well as theirs. He had a lot of entertainment and recreational events which brought us together, I think in a very effective way to get to know one another and congeal as a working unit. That continued on through his administration which that esprit de corps very high.

DR. CRAWFORD: What changes did you remember in his cabinet functions? Did your meetings change in any way?

DR. FOWINKLE: Well, we became of course a lot more specific as time went by. We identified our problem areas and our ideas for forward movement and focused in on them a lot more quickly and sharply than we did in the



early days. I can well remember that. I almost felt the transition occur when we really got down to meaningful business after our period of orientation and acclamation.

We shifted to real hard businesses of the day. And there were a lot of them in the health field. Of course, we were facing a Medicaid program which was rapidly growing and financially getting out of hand as it was all over the country. Cost of health care beginning to inflate in those days showing early warning signals of the exaggerated inflation which occurred, provider groups trying to get used to working more and more with government, the tensions between government and provider groups, generally, environmental problems were beginning to intensify: These were some of the items that I brought to the table. Of course there were many others. The same problems we have seen through the years--prisons, education, and its immense problems and mental health with its changing needs and styles of treatment and care and so forth.

So we began to focus in on those specifics very shortly after we got together and arrived and congealed as a team.

DR. CRAWFORD:           What would you say your first problems that you had to deal with were? What was the first issue that came from the Department of Public Health?

DR. FOWINKLE:           During the Winfield Dunn administration ?

DR. CRAWFORD:           Yes sir.

DR. FOWINKLE:           It's a little hard for me to remember precisely because my whole experience with



state government is a continuum through four administrations. It's a little hard to be precise this far down the stream in what those first problems were in those days.

I can well remember one that we saw coming forward which was the interest in building a medical school in the Tri-city area of East Tennessee.

DR. CRAWFORD                    You would have been involved in that one.

DR FOWINKLE:                   We saw the very difficult decision process evolving that would relate to that one.

That was unique in the Dunn administration because the interest began to occur and the momentum began to build about the time of his election.

DR. CRAWFORD:                   It was not built out of the medical community, did it sir?

DR. FOWINKLE:                   No, I don't think it did. It was of course supported and nourished by the medical community of East Tennessee, but it grew as I recall out of several sources. One was the academic community in East Tennessee State. There were a good number of people who wanted a medical school. So it was an academic faculty idea. Now you recall the T. Cranston Bill had been passed not too many months or years before then and there were a few veterans' hospital related medical schools springing up around the country. East Tennessee University and the community saw this as an opportunity to establish one there. I think probably the early idea grew out of an academic community. Of course, then the political and all of the societal structure and of course, the



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medical community coalesced into and crossed partisan lines over there to go after that medical school with great intensity.

DR. CRAWFORD:           What were your feelings when you first heard about it?

DR. FOWINKLE:           I was young in those days, but experienced and wise enough to know that it was going to be one of those very difficult [decisions]. Yes, I could see those problems coming and well remember talking with Governor Dunn and the Director of Higher Education about some of those problems as we saw them coming. Unfortunately, I could not give good solid advice because there was no right answer. We just had to let the process develop, occur and do the best that could be done with it. As it turned out my hands were busy doing many other things and I did not become greatly involved in that process. Only in some of the early discussions and assessment of the early warning signals that were arising.

DR. CRAWFORD:           Do you have any idea at the beginning how much cost would be involved?

DR. FOWINKLE:           In terms of dollar costs I think there were some pretty good estimates. In terms of cost of occupying people's minds and attention and diverting them from other high priority activities, I don't think any of anticipated the strength of that movement and the diversion from other activities that it would in fact produce. There was an immense cost in that light.



DR. CRAWFORD: I had not really thought about that aspect of it. It must have consumed a great deal of time and attention just dealing with it.

DR. FOWINKLE: I think it did and although medical education is extremely important part of health care and government and society generally, I can tell you that I think it occupied an inordinate amount of time and energy and effort in those days. That's the way government is. We go from crisis to crisis, I think. We have to respond to the public's demands and thoughts and priorities. Often they are not the same as some of us who sit in bureaucratic or administrative types of positions and responsibilities. I think society really hasn't gotten very good at that yet. We lose a lot of energy. We dissipate a lot of energy and use a lot of resources in directions that probably do not justify that level of expenditure.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, you can go into administration I'm sure with plans for it and what you want to accomplish and then sometimes you have to deal with things that you do not anticipate at all. That's a case in point, I suppose.

DR. FOWINKLE: Yes, that is a constant frustration, and I guess enjoyment, so to speak, in public administration. As one goes through the years in trying to achieve things, are all the diversions that occur from trying to get at what you think are the top priority items on the



agendas. But often the public and public movement is much better and much more precise than the expert's prediction that might be important. No always, I think, but often. There are lessons to be learned there.

DR. CRAWFORD:           What did you think of the outcome of the  
                          East Tennessee State Medical School? Were  
you pleased with the way it was settled?

DR. FOWINKLE:           That's the question that really doesn't  
                          have a right answer. The answer is yes  
and no. I think the school is doing remarkably well. It has  
attracted some good faculty. It has produced some good  
students. It has filled a need in East Tennessee and the  
surrounding states.

Whether or not it has been a good investment for Tennessee taxpayers, whether or not the investment has been worth its cost in the broad term of cost to all those who have supported it, I'm not sure even at this late date. I think probably in retrospect, not. And it has nothing to do with the idea or the need or the process, but with the unpredictable fact--unpredictable at that time--that we as a nation would shortly thereafter be producing an excess of physicians. So we are seeing the growth of medical schools occur with a start of lag time and certainly a four-year lag time before they produce graduates and another four years before they produce generally physicians that are out providing care. So you have an eight-year lag time.



We found that--in typical American style I guess--we started trying to solve the problem too late as a nation and by the time we got a solution in place, we began to produce an excess which is another problem. Then contraindicated, so to speak, the start up of a good many medical schools that recently were started. So now we have the necessity to cut back classes in most every medical school around the country to move back classes in most every medical school around the country to move back off of that position of overproduction at a time a lot of young medical schools are scrambling for survival.

DR. CRAWFORD: They don't want to cut back.

DR. FOWINKLE: They don't want to cut back nor disappear  
and we are in a position of overproduction.

So I think that if one had been smart enough in those days to predict that reality I think we would have to say that it was a bad idea.

DR. CRAWFORD: Of course, predicting the future of anything is very difficult.

DR. FOWINKLE: Predicting ten years away in this fast moving society is almost impossible. That's correct.

DR. CRAWFORD: I believe this was totally unexpected by the governor. So far as I know of everyone in the administration, no one saw that coming.

DR. FOWINKLE: I don't think anybody did at the time the election occurred and the time the inaugu-





ation occurred. It came as I recall, it arose for the first time in our vision as shortly after the election.

DR. CRAWFORD:           What about environmental matters? I know you had to deal with them too. What were the ones that you had to give most attention to?

DR. FOWINKLE:           The environment during my career in Public Health went through a full range of ups and downs. Let me see if I can place into the Dunn administration where we were on the curve. So let me go back if I might and describe a little bit of how I see the environmental predicament occurring.

Back before I came to state government in the late 1960's and theretofore, there was not adequate societal attention to environmental problems. I think I can say that with considerable accuracy. For example, when I was local health officer, we had an industry that was located very near a grade school. And it was emitting into the air some toxic material. I think it had chlorine gas in it to the extent that that emission was etching the windows in the school. My contention was if it etches the windows in the school it is bound to be having a negative effect on the lungs of the children inside as well as the faculty and everyone else. So I considered that to be a public health problem and we tried to get that industry to correct the problem or close down the industry.

Finally, we took to court unsuccessfully because society generally did not recognize the severity of environmental problems. That carried right on into the judiciary. You couldn't



get the attention that there was a problem. So there was a shortage of public awareness and concern about environmental problems.

I think that was the beginning to fade in the Winfield Dunn days, but not completely. So I was as a public health person on the other end of the spectrum trying to pull society along saying, "You'd better pay attention to some of the environmental problems." In the early days of the Dunn Administration, I think I was still doing some of that. Then, not because of anything I did, but because of a set of national circumstances society just moved to the next chapter.

The environmental movement began and as many movements I think, it perhaps was late starting so that the problems were great and there was an abrupt recognition of the problems and it caught on and burned like a wildfire. So that within that four-year period of the Dunn administration we saw an apathy turn into a hysteria. So the pendulum went all the way across, as I recall, during that administration in the environmental scene.

Here I was as a public health officer precisely on the other side because the pendulum had swung. I was over here trying to pull it one way and it zoomed by me and then here I found myself trying to pull it back because I saw society doing some things in opposition to industry that I felt was going to be damaging to society's general needs. We wanted to kill industry as a society. We wanted to stop productions. We wanted to stop producing energy--coal-fired electrical plants--because



they put out smoke. We wouldn't even consider getting into nuclear power with that mind-set. We were opposing the Alaskan pipeline. You could see other societal problems occurring. You have to heat nursing homes and hospitals too. So there's a health effect to these types of industrial overreactions.

I found myself thrown into a position that was somewhat uncomfortable for a public official to be pulling against something that I had been saying was good all along and then finally seeing myself on the other side of the street pulling it back.

DR. CRAWFORD: And then it had passed you by.

DR. FOWINKLE: That's right. So here I was having to change my position right there in the public eye. I'm sure with a great deal of questions in the media and in the eyes of those who knew and understood me even--"What is that guy Fowinkle doing?" "Is he wishy-washy or has he suddenly become a conservative Republican or what?" I had to say that I am not talking at anything. I am talking about people's health. It was hard to convince society in those days that I was their champion. That was an extraordinarily difficult thing. I haven't talked with Winfield Dunn in recent years about that, but I'm certain he must have been a bit uncomfortable with the predicament that I was thrown into and my conscientious attempts to deal with such a thing.

DR. CRAWFORD: He understood your position though.



DR. FOWINKLE: I think he did and I think we talked about it. I can't recall the details of that, it was an extraordinarily difficult era through which to live. Then it began to settle down. I think an equilibrium occurred perhaps toward the end of his administration. The backlash to the hysteria began to occur and we began to get things on a more even keel. Then I could function on a more rational and responsible basis.

DR. CRAWFORD: That consumed a lot of time too. didn't it?

DR. FOWINKLE: That consumed a lot of time. As a matter of fact, during those days we found that the diversity of tasks of Public Health began to split up across the nation. We found before those days that Public Health usually consisted of the usual Public Health programs like immunizations, and infectious disease control, and well-baby care and dental programs and things of this nature. But also we were thrown into in those days medical care financing--primarily medicaid--and other programs, such as crippled children's, speech and hearing and many others. Medicaid was the big one.

We became public health, we became general medical care and financing and administration mechanisms, then we became environmentally concerned. The intensity of these programs grew during the early 1970's to the extent that there was a lot of splintering. We had state EPEA's where we had Departments of Environment, Public Health Departments, and Medicaid Depart-





ments so to speak, but Tennessee kept all three together. Many times I was functioning much as a secretary over several different departments rather than a director of a single department. Even before the concept of groupings of departments and secretaries over several departments ever occurred we in public health were doing that sitting over three departments in effect. That required that I spend a lot less time at the detail level and a lot of more time in big picture things, a lot more delegation and a lot less familiarity and involvement at the detail level. That all occurred during the Dunn administration.

DR. CRAWFORD:           What kind of staff did you have when you came in during the previous administration?

DR. FOWINKLE:           Well, if you turned the pages back eighteen months before the Winfield Dunn administration began, I took over a department that was aging and not ready for the movement that it faced. Medicaid again being the big surprise. Governor Ellington called me in to take this program being the big one that was coming on the scene. We had a department at that time that had, as I recall, maybe 2500 employees and a budget of about \$20,000,000 which sounds big, but let me finish this statement--remember 2500 employees and say \$20,000,000. The department grew rapidly during that administration by necessity, simply by load and mainly the growth of the Medicaid program. I can't remember the figures of those days, but it was in a continuum from the \$20,000,000 budget to a now budget that is approaching a billion dollars in that one



department. Medicaid alone is over \$700,000,000 budget. So the dollar level grew rapidly. The number of people grew very slowly and justifiably so. You don't have to have a lot of people to administer a big program like Medicaid. It's a big payment program, but the problems go along the growth of the dollar line rather than the growth of the personnel line.

So we saw a rapid growth per necessity even in a more conservative environment. We saw a rapid growth occur particularly in the Department of Health during those years.

DR. CRAWFORD:           You were there at the time of a lot of change. What did you need in order to handle Medicaid? More staff?

DR. FOWINKLE:           Well, more staff was a problem. We asked and obtained more staff. More money was essential for a variety of reasons. One driving force is the nursing home industry. It was pathetic back before the Medicaid days! Do you remember the poor house model where people were sent to be warehoused and die, so to speak in nursing homes. In those days, nursing homes were paid \$3 or \$4 a day to take care of a patient's needs. Medicaid came along then with a societal commitment to provide care for the elderly mainly through Medicare, but the nursing home piece of that was in Medicaid. Medicare does not pay for nursing homes services. Medicaid is the big federal/state program for nursing homes services.



So we saw an industry born.

DR. CRAWFORD:           You really did.

DR. FOWINKLE:           The modern nursing home industry grew out of Medicaid. It was just happening under our eyes during the Winfield Dunn administration. You saw the poor house disappear and the nursing home arise. Now that doesn't mean that nursing home were perfect in those days, nor are they perfect now. But if you compare them to the poor houses, there was immense progress during those days, but at an expenditure level that tracked that progress. In the early days and right on up to the present, Medicaid subsidized and does still subsidize 70% to 80% of the total nursing home industry which consumes almost

So you can see the intensity of the growth of that industry and finally meeting the needs of the elderly with a growing elderly population. All combined to create a force that simply required a great deal of attention, of design work, of socio/political expression and of economic growth.

That birth occurred during the Dunn administration--that birth of that industry. Very, very difficult, politically difficult, economically difficult and administratively difficult period of time.

DR. CRAWFORD:           A lot of figures to keep up with, wasn't it?

DR. FOWINKLE:           Oh yes. Yes, it would stretch one's brain to keep up with the figures. I well remember one day. Well, it was three or four years before I could



take a vacation after I took the job. That went on well into the Dunn administration because I simply didn't have the time to get away nor did I think that I could turn my back on that big organization and with its growth curve and problems and so forth. Remember we were building it from an aging rocking chair department into a modern streamlined computerized high-tech system. It was immensely exciting but challenging and difficult.

DR. CRAWFORD:           It might have been easier if you had started with a new agency and set up to meet the needs there.

DR. FOWINKLE:           Well, I'm sure a lot of people thought that we thought we did. We made a lot of changes--made a lot of changes. Most of those, all of those were changes for technical reason, for production reason, for evolving high-tech reasons, and not for political reasons. But it is hard to convince people often that the big changes that were occurring right then were not politically instigated. They were not!

Winfield Dunn was wonderful to work with, straight down the middle, the best people to do the job, a great guy to work with.

DR. CRAWFORD:           You had good support from the Governor's office for all these programs?

DR. FOWINKLE:           Absolutely. The spirit of cooperation was superb. The needs and available resources





were of course as tight as they are now. People didn't like to pay taxes any more then than they do now. We were trying to stretch dollars and tightly consider priorities. I had to compete with everybody else for the dollar as one would expect to have to do, but in face of that the support was superb.

Winfield brought to the administration there a lot of things that make a difference. One is: He was innately honest.<sup>4</sup> I don't know of anybody that ever had any justifiable reason to challenge his honesty. He was innately honest. He was a remarkably religious person. We began cabinet meetings with a prayer often led by Winfield himself. That spirit of public service and that responsibility and that sincerity and that adherence to mission permeated the cabinet. That was good and that was needed and that was powerful. He brought into government on the one hand a lack of administrative experience and political experience and made a lot of mistakes. He often kidded himself saying the only time he didn't have his foot in his mouth was when he was changing feet. (Laughter) He laughed and we laughed about that. He came in with a lack of experience in administration and politics, but with a brilliant mind and an unbelievable amount of energy. His learning curve was just as fast as you could imagine any human could achieve.

DR. CRAWFORD:           He didn't know it when he started, but he learned right along.

DR. FOWINKLE:           He learned by intellectual energy and he learned by experience. Of course, when one learns by experience there are mistakes and there is a trauma-



tic response often. He was stable enough, big enough, confident and energetic enough and right enough to survive that short learning period. Those of us who knew him and knew the cabinet and could compare with other administrations very much appreciated and valued that commitment, that energy, that mission and that rightness--spirit of rightness--that was there. That among several other strengths that he had I think made a very strong impression in my mind of the Winfield Dunn days.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, you have seen enough to have some comparisons and not just describe his alone. What else do you think ought to be added to this record, Dr. Fowinkle?

DR. FOWINKLE: Again, if we focus on the man Winfield Dunn I think, I could make several comparisons and several comments from governor to governor. I think I could say good things about all of them and some bad things about all of them.

I think Winfield's strengths are those that I just mentioned plus his great intuition on deal with people. I guess one way to say this is he was the best governor that I have ever seen in Tennessee or anywhere else in the ceremonial aspects of the governor's job. And I say that very positively. He of course, was an articulate and glamorous person, but there are articulate and glamorous people who don't do what I call a good job in the ceremonial department of government. He can make nice speeches and do things well and it goes far beyond



that. He could sense probably as well or better than anybody I know the feelings of people.

Let me give you an example. In those days we were starting up an emergency medical program to provide ambulances to the poor counties across the state who couldn't buy ambulances to convey sick and injured people to the hospitals around the state. So state and federal government had dollars available to buy ambulances. I well remember having a bright new shiny ambulance up there on the capitol parking lot one day where we had the county judge of some tiny county--I don't even remember which part of the state this was--we were presenting to that county judge his new ambulance. He had a delegation of people from the county there. In accepting the ambulance, the county judge said, "Governor, why do you all give a very nice ambulance like this to a little old bitty county like ours?"

I was about to say, "Well, it is because there's a need", and some of the medical and technical reasons.

Winfield looked this guy in the eye and he said, "Because Judge, you and your type are the most important people in this state." That judge felt 10 feet high and should have!









THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THIS PROJECT IS "AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE WINFIELD DUNN ADMINISTRATION." THE DATE IS AUGUST 1, 1985. THE PLACE IS NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE. THE INTERVIEW IS WITH DR. EUGENE W. FOWINKLE. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE. TRANSCRIBED BY BETTY WILLIAMS. INTERVIEW #2.

DR. CRAWFORD: Go ahead with the story please sir.

DR. FOWINKLE: I think I was about through with that. The point I was making was that Winfield Dunn had a sensitivity to the needs of people and was expert in responding to those needs and those sensitivities so that people felt good, and justifiably felt good, around Winfield Dunn. I think when I say the ceremonial part of the governor's job I wanted you to know that I mean far more than just making good speeches and looking good. It's meeting that human need for attention and understanding and that sort of thing which I think separates him from most people that I know.

DR. CRAWFORD: Young people who have spent time with him seem to react very positively to him. He must do something right.

DR. FOWINKLE: I think that is much deeper than his political aspirations. It's a human characteristic or human desire to respond to human needs. On



a very personal basis, a one to one as well as to societal basis generally. He is very strong in that area.

I might continue if you like with. . . . since I did go through four administrations and make some comparisons.

DR. CRAWFORD: You have a rare advantage.

DR. FOWINKLE: Make some comparisons of the governors and of the administrations. I can't do this in any great depth, but I think I can make some generalizations that might be of interest to you.

DR. CRAWFORD: If you could sir, I think it would be extremely helpful. Not many people can do it for not many people served in the cabinet through that period of time.

DR. FOWINKLE: Let me start if I might with Governor Ellington. I described a little bit about him earlier in this interview. Looking at him as a man and as an administrator and as a governor, there are certain things that stand out very clearly in my memory. One is Governor Ellington lived and was governor in a period of time when there was a transition in societal expectations of governors and of politicians generally.

I think it was expected for example that people in political office would achieve some economic benefit of that office beyond the salary of that office so to speak.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, that's the way it used to be.

DR. FOWINKLE: So that you expected roads to go



near his farm. Things are not illegal, but yet are economically beneficial in the governor's role. During his administration I felt that society was changing its expectations of governors. They thought they were there to serve a social need. We'll reimburse the governor by salary and certain other amenities of the office, but we didn't expect it to go therebeyond.

I thought Buford Ellington diagnosed that social change very nicely, quickly and accommodated magnificently to it. He was extraordinarily cautious. I think [he was] honest in my experience with him in making that transition. So that you would in years past expect governors to come out of the governorship with a lot more personal gain than Buford Ellington did. That occurred right then in history in my observation.

DR. CRAWFORD: That did not occur before.

DR. FOWINKLE: That doesn't bear on the man except to the fact that he diagnosed it and responded and did not try to carry it beyond the time of social expectation.

Looking at him as a governor and as an administrator, he had a rare ability to make a person want to do what he wanted them to do not because he was governor but because they simply wanted to do it. A lot of this was just skill--politics and administration--and I guess a lot of it was ingrained in the man or genetically acquired or something. He just made you feel like you wanted to do what he wanted



done in some almost magical sort of way. I am trying to think of an example. Well, I can't right now. He had that rare ability to make you want to respond just because you were his friend and you didn't want to disappoint him in his expectation of you and your performance. A very warm type of person.

He was a very fine and experienced administrator. You recall perhaps and history and facts will bear this a lot better than my memory, but he came up through the ranks of state government, served as a Commissioner of Agriculture, I believe.

DR. CRAWFORD: Under Frank Clement.

DR. FOWINKLE: So he was an experienced administrator in state government and carried that experience right on into the governorship. He was an expert in delegation and management skills. He was a very strong and experienced person in the governor's office.

Let me switch on to Winfield Dunn and I think I have said a few things about him that are unique. One was his , not only glamour and ceremonial abilities, but his sincerity and his people's skills and his innate drive to meet the needs of people that made him unique. He was a very friendly and warm and open governor so that we felt no problem going to his house playing tennis going up and taking a shower in his bathroom and going on to another trip or obligation. I've never had that freedom and closeness or friendship, so to





speak, with a governor. It has been more of a business relationship. We had a business relationship but we also had a personal relationship and that has continued through the years. I think I wasn't unique. I mean I think his range of close friends extends far beyond most of us. Most of us have two or three really good friends. I think Winfield had dozens or hundreds of really good friends. Not closeness from a political standpoint, but real friends. I think he is unique in his ability to accommodate and satisfy the needs of and have close relationships with a lot of people--a unique man in that regard. Again, his innate honesty and sincerity and intellect carried him through a very difficult learning curve and a very difficult administration in many ways. It continues to carry him I think through life and will in the future. A very strong personal man with very sound principles.

I'll move on to Governor Blanton. History has already been written about Ray Blanton. I think people know him in many many ways. I'll stay away from it only to say that from a personal standpoint and professional standpoint Ray Blanton was a man of his word on a handshake, eye-to-eye individual basis. I looked him in the eye when we were first talking about my serving in his administration and I said I would be very pleased to serve in your administration under certain conditions and I spelled those out. One being that I considered health my politics and that I not wear a political partisan badge and if I could serve him in that way I would



and if not, I wouldn't. He accepted that and I'll have to tell you through his entire difficult administration he honored that commitment. He left me alone and he let me do my job. He supported me and he was available to me. I could generally get him on the phone in five minutes and could almost always see him within an hour about a problem. So he was available. He was supportive in any activities that I felt were not appropriate or unsatisfactory to me political or otherwise. He let me alone. I can look back and tell you that I respect the man for that. He, I felt, did not have a lot of great personal strength as a governor, but he was very strong in honoring a personal handshake eye-to-eye commitment. He took some shocks and jolts among his own staff and others to adhere to that commitment that he made me in the early days.

Lamar Alexander, you recall, in fact was a very good supporter and colleague of Winfield Dunn. [He] left and went into law practice and in many ways is very much like Winfield Dunn. [He is] an innately honest person, a brilliant man, an experienced and skillful politician, a superb administrator, a skilled manager, a decentralist, a person who relied, probably more strongly than any of the four governors I served under, on his cabinet. He provided leadership but not direction. You are on your own. You're CEO of your own company. I think when you work with Lamar Alexander he provided very little policy direction--support, an ear or availability, but not direction.



He very carefully chose his cabinet so that they were able to run their own businesses without interference. Rarely can I remember Lamar Alexander suggesting how I do something. He would talk about it--talk about options--but a superb delegator and decentralist. I got the feeling that he was more difficult on his staff and justifiably so because staff is an extension of the Governor himself. So he wanted them to behave like he behaves, do what he wants done and the way that he wants it done, but not his cabinet. So there was a distinction. The first time I had seen it in governors as a matter of fact between staff and cabinet.

DR. CRAWFORD:                   One had more independence and the other had maybe less.

DR. FOWINKLE:                   I think that is right. There was more centralization in the other administrations and I think including Winfield Dunn's administration when he was able to exert that centralized control because of experience, and knowledge and understanding of the issue of the day. When not, of course, he was always very free to rely upon the judgment of his cabinet. He was active and helpfully active, I'll have to tell you, in management matters. Lamar Alexander is a very different sort of administrator in that way.

Again I think these are relative strengths and weaknesses. And each had strengths in ways of doing things and I think that reflects the differences in human beings. It 's kind of fun to look back and analyze the strengths and



weaknesses, the approaches and the styles of the various governors and make some comparisons.

DR. CRAWFORD:                   You have seen quite a lot of Tennessee, you know, working through four gubernatorial administrations. And not a lot of people have.

DR. FOWINKLE:                   I got a thrill as you can look around in my office and see of identifying with Tennessee culture and Tennessee history.

Winfield Dunn commissioned, for example, these three pieces of art, being a very art conscious person. But I think they symbolize Tennessee culture in many ways--the outdoors, the wildlife, the independence, the art styles and he did a great deal in cabinet experiences. We had cabinet meetings as often in state parks and got to know the natural beauty and natural history of Tennessee.

DR. CRAWFORD:                   Did you like that?

DR. FOWINKLE:                   I liked that. We had entertainment at cabinet meetings of Tennesseans.

I mean we had the "Grand Ole Opry" crowd. You know Minnie Pearl was a next door neighbor to the Governor's residence. She and many many others entertained the cabinet, met with the cabinet, worked with the cabinet. So our entertainment was Tennessee entertainment. We got to know Tennessee during his administration. I carried that on through my experience in state government so that I got a thrill out of going to the big cities and going to the top of the big buildings and





meeting with industrial and business representatives.

But I also got a thrill going to the little towns and sitting on the kegs around the stoves where county business and county politics and county services in human needs were discussed and met.

I got a joy of going to the big Baptist Hospital in Memphis and to the Vanderbilt Hospital and Medical School and its fine research facilities. But I also got a thrill in going into the tiny little health department or doctor's offices around the state and seeing that side of the life of Tennessee as well.

I guess every governor got a thrill out of that, but I guess possibly Winfield Dunn transposed that notion into a reality by experiences. So we had cabinet experiences and individual experiences that related to Tennessee culture and entertainment and education and business and natural resources and so forth that was a little unique.

DR. CRAWFORD: It was a fascinating experience. Of the four administrations--this is probably subjective--but which one was more exciting to work in?

DR. FOWINKLE: Well exciting is a difficult term to define. I don't know that I could do an honest job of answering that question. But I'll tell you this, state government is an exciting experience particularly at the cabinet level. It's a mixture of things. It's a mixture of power, of prestige, of comfort in



accommodation in many ways. You can get a state plane and go somewhere or you can call people and ask them to pick you up. There are certain amenities like this which are fun and nice and comforting. On the other side it is frustrating, it's demeaning and downgrading, you're banged around a lot, you're criticized a lot and often unjustifiably, you're suspect. There's a lot on the downside.

The thing that is surprising to learn in state government, and I've seen this happen in every cabinet, is the quality of the people that are there doing the job at all levels--the governorship, the cabinet, and perhaps more dramatically at the middle managerial and the line worker levels.

DR. CRAWFORD:                   The department heads and assistants and so forth?

DR. FOWINKLE:                   I've had many, many people to come forward. One of Winfield Dunn's cabinet said, "I was reluctant to come into state government because I thought everybody was my old image of a politician, cheat, an alcoholic, a loafer." He said "Never have I been more surprised. Here are real people. Here are people with high systems of values generally. Here are people who have competence far beyond your level of expectation. Here are people who work well into the night and back early the next morning. Here are people who are underpaid, overworked, have a missionary spirit." I've heard this over and over and over again.



I expected the same thing when I came. I found what I described when I came and I saw others come and go with the same surprise.

DR. CRAWFORD: Can you say that about all cabinets of all four of the administrations?

DR. FOWINKLE: I can say that about all four of the administrations. There was often doubt, reluctance, suspicion of the line worker particularly of their competence and their commitment and then a surprise and exhilaration that occurred once you find that there are people with such a high level of commitment and competence and willingness to work in production capacity. That, I guess, is the biggest surprise as people come to and leave the administration and cabinet positions. You see converts over and over to the validity of the people in government.

There is an awareness--a learning curve--but an awareness of the validity of the system, of the balance of power, of the product that comes out of a legislature that is elected with built-in conflicts of interest. Almost all of them are there to represent something or somebody or have something in mind or some agenda and when you mix it all up it all comes out generally when you look back at it particularly as a public good. It surprises and amazes most of us how all this can work in fact generally for public good.

I think you'll find this is one of the exciting things that Winfield Dunn sees about government. He's been out for



awhile. I asked Winfield, "Why would you consider going back into that thing?"

"Well, there's a certain validity about the whole thing."

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, he enjoyed it.

DR. FOWINKLE: He enjoyed it and although you get knocked around a lot and you are disappointed a lot when you get away from it and look back as I have had the opportunity now to do for the first time in my career, you begin to appreciate and miss somewhat the satisfaction with seeing the system work and participating in it and diagnosing and participating in a very valid process.

DR. CRAWFORD: And being able to help it work a little.

DR. FOWINKLE: And helping it work a little bit. To see a need and develop a strategy to meet that need, to work the system, to get that need met in some kind of tangible way is an exciting and satisfying experience.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember the size of your staff when you started?

DR. FOWINKLE: It was about a department of about 2500 people and it went up and down as we went through the times of plenty and then the scarcity with the build-up of management and cut-back of management. I think it reached an all time high of about 5000 and then cut back again to 3500 or so at the time I left. It was an exciting opportunity for a person like myself who was not a





businessman, who had not run a company before, and who being a student of management, had an opportunity to run a pretty good sized business. Probably if you look across the state at the companies generally the Department of Public Health might be in the top 10 or 12 or 15 industries in the state. So you would stand there if you looked at government or a piece of government as an industry, and the commissioner as a chief executive officer. From a management standpoint you are a pretty good sized company. I got a lot of thrill out of managing that size of an organization of meeting people needs, of trying to stimulate people to pull their talents together, their differences together, and their diverse personalities together and to produce products. It was kind of fun to do that in a variety of political and administrative settings.

DR. CRAWFORD:                   A managerial challenge. This is an incidental question. But how did Winfield Dunn compare with the other governors as a public speaker or a communicator?

DR. FOWINKLE:                   He ranks in the top two or three of any human beings and not just governors that I've been associated with in terms of the ability to take a subject handed him often by a need or audience or a situation. Frequently having preliminary staff work to develop material--maybe even a typed up speech--and then to convert that speech into a presentation to an audience that is meaningful, valid and clear. I have gone



with Winfield Dunn on trips before and faced audiences where he would have no idea of what the subject was nor the audience when we left in the car or the plane. Occasionally, even shorter notice as walking over from the capitol to a hotel where there was a meeting going on and I would hand him a speech. He would see it for the first time. [He would] stand in the wings for five minutes, thumb through it, sit it over on the side of the podium, and convert that into a major oratorical accomplishment. I can tell you I've never seen--I know there are people--Frank Clement was supposed to have been such a person--I knew Frank, but not while he was governor. But Winfield Dunn is probably the best in terms of that kind of skill in oratory that I can easily remember.

DR. CRAWFORD:                   That does not surprise me. Would you say he was better before smaller groups or large audiences?

DR. FOWINKLE:                   I don't think it really matters. I've seen him stand before a surprised group of a half a dozen people--by surprise I mean a poor turn-out because of lack of advance notice or poor weather or whatever--and make a superb presentation as if there were 10,000 people in the audience and I've seen him stand before them--stadium's full or the auditorium's full of people--and bring it down to an almost personal one to one type of communication level. So I don't think it really mattered to Winfield what kind of group or what size group he was talking with. He had again, outstanding ability in this



area. Again, I have seen an awful lot of people during my period of state government both in-state and out-of-state and out of the country and again, I'd rank him in the top two or three of any human I've known in the ability to sense ideas, pull them together and to produce them in the form of a presentation. Often I could say that even he may have done a better job from time to time with that kind of short term intense need to prepare than to go through an awful lot of thought and preparation and internal and external debate on what he ought to say and how he ought to say it such as the state of the state address.

I think he had such a skill of dealing with things on short notice and of often a complex nature without preparation at least it appeared that he did a better job of that type. I discovered that the first day that I met him as you recall when he stood up and almost single-handedly convinced the City Council.













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